

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

Dynacord Rhythm Stick



Since the beginning of time, drumkit players have been relegated to sitting down while playing. Dynacord hopes to change all that with the *Rhythm Stick*: a guitar-shaped trigger instrument for MIDI drum machines, drum synths, keyboards, etc. The unit may be strapped over a drummer's shoulder like a guitar, enabling the drummer to go out to the front of the stage and still play drums.

The *Rhythm Stick* has eight trigger selectors near its "head," each for a separate voice of your external percussion unit. It also has two slap sensors, connected in parallel on the "neck." So, like on a guitar, your left hand selects the voices; your right hand plays the rhythm. The unit is four-voice polyphonic (meaning that any or all of the voices can be triggered simultaneously), and is dynamically sensitive (allowing you to reproduce all the natural expression in your playing). The click-on/off volume control is actually the control for sensitivity value. A separate power supply connects to the *Rhythm Stick*; the five-pin socket for MIDI hookup is located

on the power box.

With the *Rhythm Stick*, it's possible to program various trigger selector/voice combinations and recall them during performance via two push buttons near the bottom of the body. Certain programs are preset by Dynacord for use with such instruments as the Simmons *SDS9*, Yamaha *DX7*, *RX15*, Linn *9000*, Roland, etc. There are also nine available "modes," all selectable by another two push buttons. Both the Program and Mode buttons have numeric LED read-outs.

Switching from "guitar feel" mode to "drum feel" enables you to generate trigger pulses on the selector pad, without having to hit the slap sensors. Up to four pulses may be generated this way, and when these pulses are combined with the two slap sensors, there's the potential for some complex rhythms.

Mode 3 allows the locking of Selector Five in order to hold a constant voice throughout, no matter what other instruments you're triggering. For example, you

could lock in a running hi-hat pattern while manually triggering snare and bass. Mode 4 assigns notes via MIDI on the 16 user programs. Mode 5 selects the MIDI channel for outputting *Rhythm Stick* data. Mode 6 adjusts the intensity of pulse volumes, and Modes 7 and 8 are merely displays of velocity values and MIDI factory preset note settings.

The modern hi-tech world seems to be getting more and more outrageous (and complicated, too). The *Rhythm Stick* definitely takes some getting used to in order to master it. Depending on where your voices are assigned, you sometimes have to rearrange your thinking about what you're doing completely. The unit is set up for right-handed people, which could be a bit of a drawback for lefties.

I can't really imagine a band using the *Rhythm Stick* in every song they play. But in terms of visual value and enhancing a given performance, the *Rhythm Stick* is certainly unique. (The unit could also be used by keyboardists, MIDIed through a keyboard synth set up for drum sounds. This is a little strange when you consider it, but it just serves to demonstrate that there are lots of possibilities with the *Rhythm Stick*.)

It's important to remember that the *Rhythm Stick* is not a synthesizer or sound generator of any kind in and of itself; it is merely a triggering device for external sound-generating equipment. The quality of sound produced will depend entirely on the quality of the unit being triggered.

Although perhaps not for every drummer, the *Rhythm Stick* certainly opens a lot of doors for those drummers and percussionists who've felt "grounded" up to now. The unit retails for \$895.00.



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